The belief of the Magyars in man's survival beyond the grave 775 763
originates in pre-Christian times; it is deep-rooted and generally
accepted. Death, therefore, is not necessarily a cause for sorrow.
In his last minutes, the dying person, stretched out on the floor
of the main living room, calmly takes leave from his family and
friends who, in turn, entrust him with messages to be delivered to those
he is about to join. The preparation of the corpse is the duty of 764 [402]
women, who outfit the dead in his wedding attire or best outfit (in
some regions, harta e.g., in white). In the coffin (mostly black
but also blue, red, or green) they place food, tobacco, favorite tools,
or toys, if the dead person was a child. The grave itself always
faces east. The burial ceremony is followed by the tor which is to-
day a simple banquet, but which used to be until quite recently an
occasion of joyful celebration. This feast, as with all of the Ob- [769]
Ugric peoples, actually served the purpose of entertaining and pro-
pitiating the spirit of death.

Customs connected with marriage show surprising parallelisms 766
with burial customs. Deceased spinsters are often buried in a wedding
outfit and, in some regions, a young man who died before having a chance
to get married will be given a symbolic bride who, clad in wedding
attire, accompanies him to the grave and is supposed to mourn him as

774 and exchanges his own child for it. Such a child is called «changed», «changed child». Of course it can be changed back, but that is a difficult, heavy, complicated task and is not always successful. Therefore it is best to hurry up with the baptism so that such troubles may be avoided.

775 Of course the most ghastly thing for a wretched mother is that her child should die without being christened. The Matyós believe that the soul of the unfortunate child in this plight wanders about miserably, and each seventh year appears in some bush or hedge, until some good soul takes pity on it. The person who sees such an unchristened soul in the place mentioned, must take pity on it and throw a white cloth at it saying : — «I christen you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit ; if you are a boy your name shall be Adam, if you are a girl it shall be Eve !» — After this the erring soul is immediately freed, turns into an angel and the Gates of Heaven are opened before it.

Hungarian Minstrels

(The Regös)

533 Minstrelsy is the remnant of a pagan custom, which is at least two thousand years old. In Hungary we find many minstrel practices which have never existed amongst minstrels in other parts of Europe. If the original meaning of an ancient custom gets obliterated, it is of no importance whether something is added to or taken away from it. Thus fragments alone remain. In one instance parts of the words have remained intact, in another traditions of pagan times haunt the tune, in a third the costumes of the performers reveal the ancient custom, or lastly the ancient, primitive human soul

783 Spring has arrived, and therefore people are filled with thoughts about the fate of the crops. Will there be a revival of nature, will there be a renewal of everything, will there be a good harvest, fertility? . . . Let everything be refreshed and cleaned . . . They dust, mend, whitewash, scrub, wash; men clean themselves, animals are bathed, even the soul is spring cleaned, this being the period of industrious confessing . . . Everything is resplendent with cleanliness. According to a popular song even the raven washes her son on Good Friday . . .

783 In old Hungarian calendars the second day of Easter is called «Ducking Monday», because on this day it was 883 the custom to throw the girls into water and duck them. Now-a-days the custom is much milder, as the girls are no longer thrown into water; the lads merely lay them in the trough and refresh them with a few buckets of water so that if they marry they may become bright women. And if we add, that in some districts all this happens at the creak of dawn, it is evident that the custom is a fairly drastic one for girls even at present! Where the custom is even milder, the girls are only dragged to a well, and they pass the ceremony of the katharsis at the expense of a few buckets of water. This is well worth their while, because lovely flowers thus watered will certainly not wither away.

Not only must the girls put a good face on their enforced early morning bath, they must even pay for it: with rolls, a glass or two of brandy, in most places with a few painted eggs. These may be boiled or raw, and in Hungarian they are called «red eggs» as they are mostly painted red.

• 775 The egg has a manifold symbolic meaning, dating from ancient, even pre-historic times: in the latter it had a realistic religious meaning. In pre-historic tombs egg

775 shells are as often found as in medieval graves. Already at that time they were the symbol of resurrection, or were even designed to promote resurrection. In China the presenting of eggs in spring is a two thousand year old custom. Christianity took it over from the ancient people, and made it the symbol of the Saviour's resurrection. In the ancient faith of some peoples the universe developed from an egg, just as Castor and Pollux, who of old personnified light and shadow, were hatched from Leda's egg.

883 In some parts of the country Hungarian children, boys and girls, give each other painted eggs, which are regarded as tokens of engagement or friendship; and after having exchanged eggs, they call each other «fiancé» or friend.

531 The painting of eggs has a special technique. The designs are drawn on the eggs with wax, and the eggs are then dipped into cold paint. Painted eggs form one of the most interesting and from the point of view of design, most varied fields of Hungarian art. As in all brands of Hungarian popular art, here too flower designs are the most wide-spread form of decoration; usually red designs are applied on a white foundation. But there are plenty of brightly decorated eggs, especially amongst the Szeklers.

531 883 It is even more interesting that in some parts they shoe the eggs with tiny metal shoes, — and as the eggs are Hungarian, they even give them tiny metal spurs: they also put metal hangers on them. What can the explanation of this strange custom be? Probably that other custom, whereby the lads in some villages set up Easter trees (usually on Easter night) on the girls' gates, and on these they hang amongst other things eggs. These are called the «coat of arms» of the lads!

† [Easter -- Analyst]

The last hour having struck, the window is opened before the departing soul as before a captive bird, because its way must not be barred. Otherwise it might not find peace and might return to disturb the living . . . 763 775

The dead person's bed is made up for the last time at home. He is then clothed in his death clothes which for a lifetime have been kept for him with the utmost care. Brides keep their wedding dresses, so that fifty or sixty years later they may be their death wear. In some parts the women begin to embroider their death sheet at the age of fourty, as they want to enter a better world wrapped in their own handiwork. Girls are laid on their death beds in white dresses with a bride's wreath on their heads: their bridegroom is waiting for them in another world . . . And a lad, who dies in his prime, is supposed to be the bridegroom of Heaven . . . The coffin, that eternal bed, was not always black. Only the old people's coffins used to be painted black, those of the young were pale or dark blue, green or white . . . 764

People used to be supplied with several things for this great journey. The old Hungarians were buried with their horses, bows, quivers, later on the head at least of their favourite horse was put by their side. With a woman were buried her sickle and her combs; with a child his toys, and if he died without being baptized, they put his little shirt and his swaddle by his side; sometimes needles and thread were also added.

Occasionally the dead person's favourite possessions were also put into the coffin as provision for his journey; they were meant to cheer and quieten him. In some instances even that which he last desired: food, a bottle of wine and a pipe are also put by his side. Godly people take with them their bible, their psalm book and their rosary twisted round their fingers. In some Hungarian villages

765 few villages the mourning women tie a white linen band
822 onto their forehead. Many a folk song, which is still sung to this day, preserves old popular customs:

While I live, I'll dress in black,
When I'm dead, I'll walk in white...

Or another one:

Mother dear!
Find my white dress,
I'm starting on a journey
From which I shan't return.

Even older memories are referred to in this folk song:

I'd rather mourn for her in three colours of mourning:
On Friday in red,
On Saturday in white,
On Sunday in dead black...

765 There are places where the funeral feast is repeated at certain regular intervals. At this feast they lay a place for the deceased, crossing his knife with his fork, and putting his turned up plate on top of them, while his chair is left empty. According to a local custom when the wailing Hungarian mourners of Moldavia are offered brandy and bread, they always lift their glass and wish that the dead could also share in their drink.

• 775 According to the Funeral Speech (a historic relic from the 12th century we are dust and ashes... But according to the still live faith of our ancient religion: non omnis moriar... We shall rise again. And our people believe faithfully that we do not even die, our soul merely flies to a new world, to start a new life.

764 The crosses in the graveyard are decorated with resounding inscriptions invented either by the master carver himself, or if he has no poetic vein, then another village professional, the verse composer writes them. These inscrip-